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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 1434
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 2178
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 001251

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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TAGS: OPRC KMDR IS

SUBJECT: SPECIAL ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

U.S. Special Envoy Sen. George Mitchell to Israel, West Bank, June
8-10, 2009

Key stories in the media:

Maariv headlined that U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Peace Sen. George Mitchell Qis trying to lower the flames.Q The Jerusalem Post reported that, during a day of meetings that included four hours with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Mitchell was told that

Israel would not bring all settlement construction to a complete halt, even though this continues to be the United StatesQ stated position. The Jerusalem Post quoted one senior official as saying that there appeared to be some "convergence" between the sides, and they were moving toward a definition of the issues. Following the evening meeting with Mitchell, which included a two-hour one-on-one conversation, Netanyahu's office issued a statement that the meeting was "friendly and positive and encompassed the whole range of issues on the agenda." Netanyahu, according to the statement, said that "Israel is working to promote peace and security with our Palestinian neighbors and the wider Arab world." The media reported that Mitchell stressed the importance of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, and Washington's commitment to Israel's security. (The Jerusalem Post noted that those remarks were made Qin front of the cameras.Q) Israel Radio quoted Abbas as saying in interviews with Egyptian media that he will not resume negotiations with Israel if the latter does not freeze settlements and adopt the two-state solution. The media cited a State Department announcement that Mitchell will hold meetings in Lebanon and Syria after he leaves Israel.

MaarivQs Ben Caspit rejects Sen. MitchellQs denial of reports that he accused Israel of having lied to the U.S. Maariv further reported that similar remarks were made by U.S. officials in talks with Israeli officials in London, and Qin even stronger termsQ by other U.S. officials. (Channel 10-TV cited an argument in London where Israeli officials allegedly told their American counterparts that their demands were not fair, prompting their interlocutors to ask: QAre you saying that the President is not fair?Q) Caspit cited an unattributed cable Qthat reached decision-makers in Jerusalem and reported that the Jewish leader to whom Mitchell made the comments Qhad no choiceQ but to deny them.

Yediot and other media reported that President Obama has recently outlined a plan that would result in the establishment of a Palestinian state. The newspaper detailed reported stages of the plan -- in the immediate period: Israeli agreement to freeze settlements and to the two-state principle, and gestures by the Arab states; in the coming months: the convening of an international conference (according to Maariv, a QMadrid-styleQ conference) including the Arab states and Israel; by the end of 2010: conclusion of negotiations on the core issues and the character of the Palestinian state; during 2012: official proclamation of the Palestinian state alongside Israel. Israel TV and Yediot reported on behind-the-scenes contacts involving Israel, the U.S., France, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf states, and the EU, to promote the conference.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak was quoted as saying in an interview with HaQaretz that Benjamin NetanyahuQs government will surprise people yet. In an unrelated story, The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday, Barak told aspiring IDF officers following an extensive military drill held in southern Israel --which Maariv says was a simulation of an attack on a Syrian village -- that the armyQs future campaigns will be Qwider in scopeQ and present more dangers than JanuaryQs Operation Cast Lead in Gaza.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday, during an address at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Strategic Affairs Minister Moshe Ya'alon (Likud) delivered a blistering attack on the Obama administration's Middle East policies, suggesting that its approach toward Iran and the PA were flawed. "Just like the new administration, we too believe that friends should be candid with each other," he was quoted as saying. "It is our duty to explain to our American friends our concerns." He was referring to comments that President Obama and other officials have made recently about the need to be clear with Israel that certain policies, such as settlement expansion, aren't acceptable. Maariv and Israel Radio noted that in his address, YaQalon mentioned the Qtwo-stateQ notion, saying however that it is too early to consider it.

The Jerusalem Post quoted right-leaning Kadima Knesset Member Otniel Schneller as saying this week that acceding to ObamaQs demands to freeze building in all settlements would lead to the break-up of the party.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Israel began construction

of an underground pipeline that will deliver diesel fuel and cooking oil to the southern Gaza Strip, a decision that the IDF said follows GOI suggestion.

Yediot quoted DM Barak as saying at a convention of the Israeli Council for Peace and Security that weapons that U.S. supplied to Lebanon might end up in Hizbullah's hands. Israel Radio reported that pro-Western Lebanese politician Saad Hariri ruled out bilateral negotiations with Israel.

Channel 2-TV reported on IAF pilots' training to dodge missiles such as the Russian-made S-300s -- that Iran might use during an attack on the country. Maariv led with a report on Iran's upcoming elections by The Washington Post's Thomas Erdbrink.

U.S. Special Envoy Sen. George Mitchell to Israel, West Bank, June 8-10, 2009

Block Quotes:

II. QA Threefold Failure, and an Opportunity

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (6/10): "Three weeks after Benjamin Netanyahu returned from his visit to Barack Obama, there is no longer any doubt that the prime minister has failed in his most important mission -- to build a bond of trust with the U.S. President.... His second failure is his positions.... On Sunday, the Prime Minister will deliver an address at Bar-Ilan University. He is widely expected to use this speech to move closer to adopting the two-state solution and accepting the road map, which leads to a Palestinian state alongside Israel. If so, he will surely explain this dramatic turnabout by saying that his predecessors, who accepted the Roadmap, left him with an impossible legacy. Netanyahu's third failure is his loss of control over the agenda. Before departing for his White House meeting, Netanyahu promised to make the Iranian threat a key issue. But Obama and his aides managed to divert attention toward construction in the settlements - an issue on which Israel has no supporters.... Netanyahu's speech on Sunday will give him a second chance to try to rehabilitate his ties with Obama, adjust his government's positions to Washington's demands, and divert the agenda from the silly debate over natural growth to matters far more crucial to Israel. He may never get a third chance."

II. QThe Regional Approach Might Get Us There Faster

Kadima Knesset Member Avi Dichter, a former Internal Security Minister and head of the Shin Bet, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (6/10): "If we are determined never to leave any stone unturned in our search for peace with our neighbors, now is the time to see whether underneath the Arab initiative's proposed regional approach lies such an opportunity. While the size and weight of the boulders are great, so is the opportunity to make great strides forward. Perhaps we can reach an accommodation with our nearest neighbors by arriving first at one with those furthest away. As James Joyce wrote, 'Sometimes the longest road around is the shortest road home.'

III. QThe Old Game Is Up

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet, a former consul in Philadelphia, wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (6/10): "We have a Prime Minister who failed his exams. During his speech at Bar-Ilan University, he will have an opportunity to make up for this. Benjamin Netanyahu is known for his late awakenings. Not that he lacks talent. His problem -- and ours -- is his short-range vision.

The man has remained blind to a totally new landscape.... Churchill earned his place [in history] thanks to his fortitude facing a poor British leadership. Netanyahu is far from reaching such heights. But he must now do the best he can, even if this means his political demise. His duty to us is to understand that 'the game is up' [in English]. History will move forward without the knights of Greater Israel -- with or without Bibi.

CUNNINGHAM